



OFFICE OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

Emergency Operations Center Policy Report

Prepared for Chief Joseph E Pozzo
Loudoun County Department of Fire, Rescue and Emergency Management

February 9, 2006

Background:

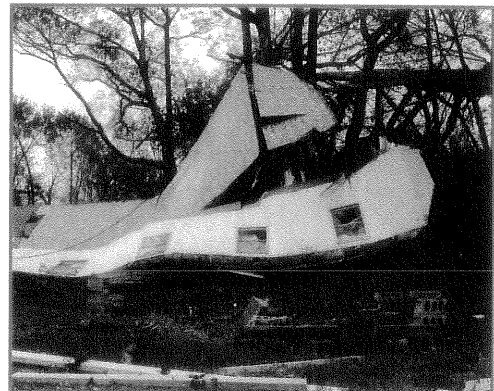
Purpose: The purpose of this policy report is to provide information necessary to garner the support of the Loudoun County Board of Supervisors Finance and Government Services Committee in an effort to secure funding for a lease for a temporary Emergency Operations Center.

Issue: The absence of a dedicated Emergency Operations Center (EOC) diminishes Loudoun County's ability to effectively manage the mitigation of, preparedness for, response to, and recovery from disasters or emergencies. Often, discussion surrounding an EOC facility revolves around the number of times it is activated. More than a room filled with people hurriedly dealing with a disaster or major emergency, the EOC is one of the most valuable tools available to the emergency management system as a whole. An actual activation is such a small portion of the EOC's role that it is unfair to compare its importance with the number of times it is used in that capacity.

"...the EOC is one of the most valuable tools available to the emergency management system..."

Current Situation:

Currently the EOC operates out of two (2) modular classrooms inside the annex at the Fire-Rescue Training Center. These classrooms are separated by a wall and are shared with training and education classes attended by career and volunteer personnel. Due to the disruptive impact on scheduled training activities, utilization of this space has historically been reserved for imminent or actual events and a handful of regional exercises. The space



available is not sufficient for or conducive to management of a disaster or major emergency based on nationally recognized best practices. Occupying this facility, particularly during severe weather, invites key decision makers within the County's leadership to perform important, imperative tasks under conditions that are, by definition, high risk and dangerous.

Chronology: Over the past two years, the Office of Emergency Management (OEM) has been searching for an answer to this issue. OEM pursued an opportunity to move to the North Street Annex vacated by the Loudoun County Public Schools (LCPS). Although initial indications were favorable, ultimately the space available was determined to be better suited for other county interests. Consideration has been given to utilizing classrooms within the Fire-Rescue Training Center. Although these rooms would be located within a more substantial structure, the issue of availability would not be addressed nor would the ancillary requirements for conference space, break rooms and other operational components of the EOC. Following the reduction in scope related to the Fire-Rescue Training Center Expansion project in 2005, the Board directed staff to identify a leased space for the EOC. As a result, the facility on Devin Shafron Drive in Ashburn was considered. That location addresses all of the immediate and foreseen needs identified by OEM and is supported by the County Administrator's Emergency Management Executive Committee.

Considerations:

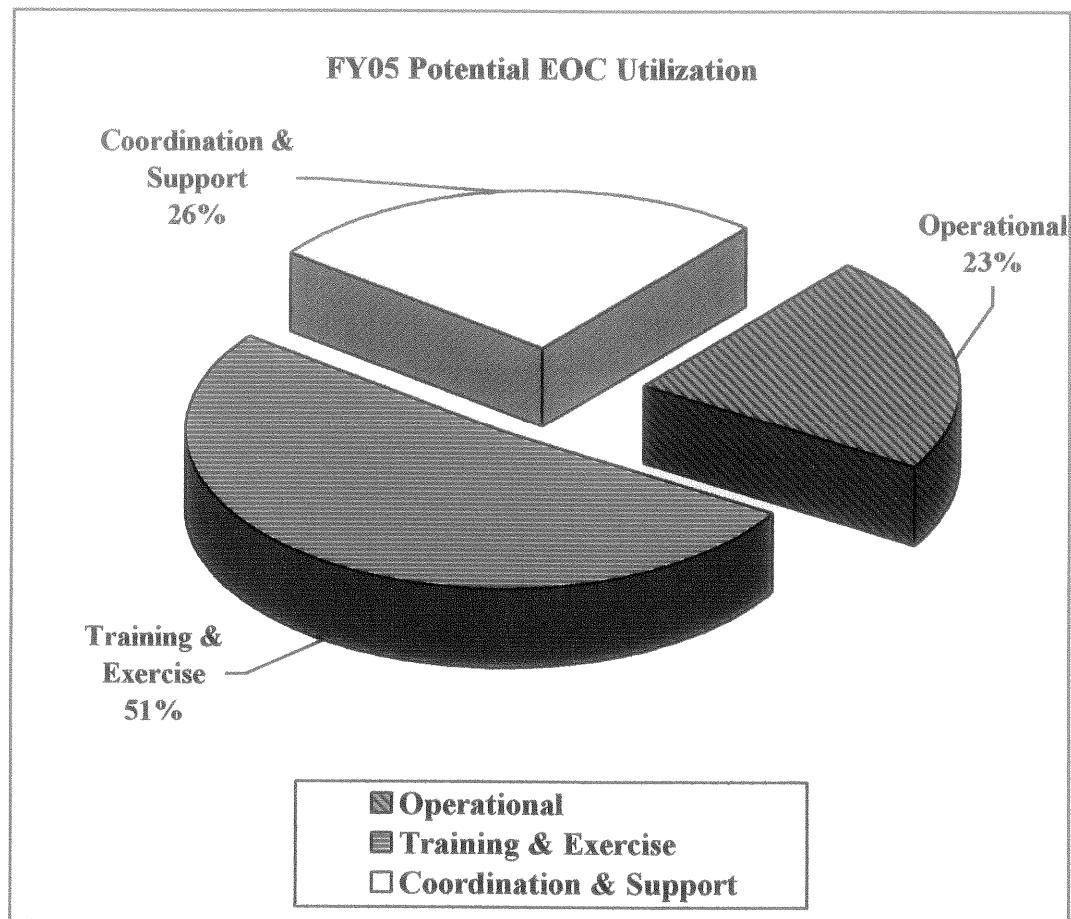
Capabilities: The ability to more fully utilize an EOC strengthens the County's emergency preparedness and response and recovery capabilities. There are three primary capability factors addressed by a dedicated EOC. The operational factor is what comes to mind for most when thinking of the EOC. However, the successful execution of an EOC operation during an emergency has a direct correlation to the amount of the time and effort invested in the other two capabilities, training and exercises (capability 2) and coordination and support activities (capability 3).

EOC Capability Factors:
1. Operational
2. Training & Exercises
3. Coordination & Support

During Fiscal Year 2005 (FY05) the current EOC was prepared for activation nine (9) times and actually activated on four (4) of those occasions. These numbers do not adequately paint the full operational picture. They are a testament to the diminished capacity of the County's emergency management system. During the same time-frame, a frank and candid review of situations when the EOC would have been either activated or used in some meaningful manner revealed a more accurate depiction of the true capabilities of a standing EOC. A report prepared by the OEM indicated a total of 35 – 40 operational activations (at some level) based on events in or around Loudoun County would have been a realistic level of operational activity.

Training is the cornerstone of preparedness. A standing EOC would have provided the venue for quarterly functional exercises for each of the eight (8) key functional areas of the EOC, three (3) Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) classes with six (6) sessions for each class, four (4) emergency management sponsored courses for EOC participants, three (3) EOC exercises and three (3) regional training courses sponsored by Loudoun County could have taken place in a dedicated facility. Instead, two (2) CERT classes were held, one (1) emergency management class for EOC participants was offered and one (1) regional class was sponsored. The deficit was, in each case, wholly or partially due to a lack of dedicated space.

From a coordination and support standpoint there were approximately 40 emergency management related meetings that could have been convened at an EOC. As the graph illustrates, less than one quarter of all opportunities to fully utilize an EOC present themselves as an operational factor. Fully realized, the EOC can and should be the foundation upon which the County's comprehensive and robust emergency management system is built.



*Lessons**Learned:*

Justifying a dedicated emergency management resource was difficult to embrace on September 10th 2001, yet was a clear priority on September 12th. As the County endeavors to prepare itself and its citizens for not only man-made disasters, but natural disasters as well, it is imperative that it meets the challenges presented with reasonable and appropriate responses. Loudoun is home to numerous public and private entities that, due to their enhanced profile or criticality of operation, find themselves at an increased risk of terrorist related activity. As part of this County's reasonable and appropriate response to that threat, it is imperative that a permanent, dedicated facility exist to assist in the mitigation and prevention of these threats and, if necessary, to coordinate an immediate and comprehensive response to and recovery from any emergency that may arise.

On January 25, 2006 Loudoun County participated in a regional EOC exercise entitled Patriot Challenge 2. Evaluators from a Commonwealth of Virginia managed contract with the consulting firm Community Research Associates (CRA) noted the following in the After Action Report (AAR) for the exercise:

Issue 8: Need for permanent Emergency Operations Center

Summary of the Issue: Loudoun County's current Emergency Operations Center is assembled for activation, in a modular trailer that belongs to the Loudoun County Fire and Rescue Department. (LCFR)

Consequence: To activate the EOC Office of Emergency Management personnel must position tables, piece together computer stations, and plug in phones. Activation of the EOC can take 2-3 hours.

Analysis: For the past several years a classroom in fire and rescue training center has doubled as a emergency operations center. During an EOC activation or exercise the fire and rescue department must find another location for the training or cancel the classes. Furthermore the EOC is located in modular trailer and it's only rated to withstand winds of 75 mph.

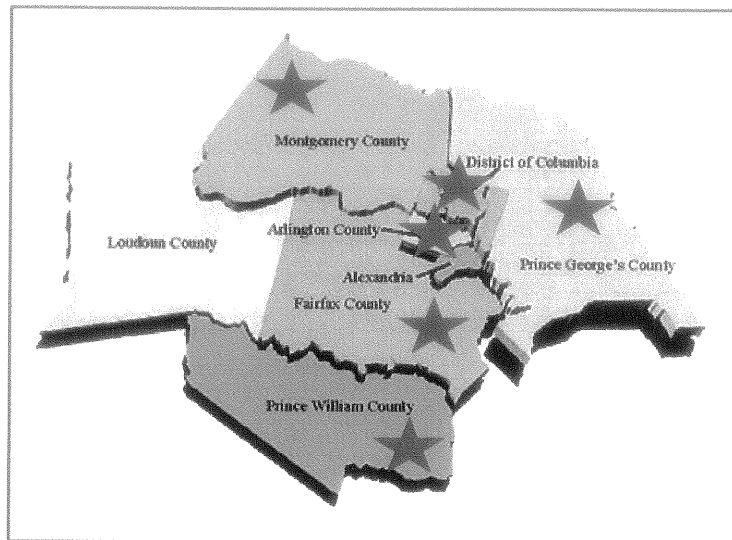
Recommendation: Loudoun County senior leaders should appropriate the funds needed to establish a permanent EOC.

This evaluation was performed by an independent, third party emergency management professional, following the Homeland Security Exercise and Evaluation Program (HSEEP) model. HSEEP is designed to provide emergency management personnel with a template to logically transition from exercise design through evaluation to identifying lessons learned and then ultimately implementing an improvement plan. The establishment of a permanent EOC is an opportunity to see this portion of the improvement plan come to fruition.

Standards: The EOC is the backbone of the county's Multiagency Coordination System. An integral component of the National Incident Management System (NIMS), the Multiagency Coordination System is a combination of facilities, equipment, personnel, procedures and communications integrated into a common system with responsibility for coordinating and supporting incident management activities. The Board adopted NIMS as the basis for all incident management in Loudoun County on October 18, 2005. The NIMS document, published as a result of Homeland Security Presidential Directive 5 (HSPD-5) defines EOCs as those facilities at which coordination of information and resources to support incident management normally takes place. Additionally it states "...Standing EOCs, or those activated to support larger, more complex events, are typically established in a more central or permanently established facility; at a higher level of organization within a jurisdiction." Although a permanent EOC is not required for NIMS compliance, it is a nationally recognized standard.

"The EOC is the backbone of the County's Multiagency Coordination System."

Regionally, the need for permanent facilities has been embraced. The red stars displayed on the National Capital Region (NCR) map indicate those jurisdictions who maintain a fully functional, standing EOC. Our regional colleagues have struggled through many of the same difficult decisions being faced by our own County leadership related to this topic. Throughout the NCR, our neighbors have, at the end of the day, acknowledged the value and criticality of these operational hubs and provided the local support necessary to move this integral tool from concept to reality.



Statute: Title 44 of the Code of Virginia stipulates that each political subdivision within the Commonwealth is responsible for local disaster mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery (§ 44-146.19. Powers and duties of political subdivisions). This is not a stagnant responsibility. Ever increasing challenges require a progression of capabilities for those who are accountable for delivery of this critical yet fundamental service. Loudoun County has made measurable progress in the post 9/11 environment, but this progress is being stymied by the lack of a facility designed to serve as the emergency management system's base of operation.

**Federal
Funding:**

The FY05 Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI) funding approved by the Chief Administrative Officers (CAO) Committee and the Senior Policy Group (SPG) includes two projects directly related to enhancing the interoperability and connectivity of EOCs within the National Capital Region (NCR). With approved funding of just under \$8 million,

The ability to benefit from regional programs is in jeopardy and may be compromised due to the absence of a facility.

the NCR is moving ahead with these initiatives. Loudoun County's ability to benefit from these regional programs is in jeopardy and may be compromised due to the absence of a dedicated, secure, and connected facility. If the County is unable to participate through the UASI process, future enhancements will need to be funded through local sources.

**Operational
Readiness:**

Much of the operational component of the emergency management system is conducted quietly, competently and without media coverage or fanfare. Examples of this type of activity include everything from convening a local conference call in preparation for a severe weather event to coordinating

"...lack of a standing EOC impedes coordination."

and monitoring the deployment of County personnel to other parts of the nation during an incident of national significance. Regardless of the size or scope of the event, a central point of coordination becomes as invaluable as the physical and human resources being utilized to manage the situation. The lack of a standing EOC impedes this coordination.

In many instances the job of emergency management staff is to monitor a situation, develop or enhance existing plans to deal with potential eventualities and to provide situational awareness to County leaders, including the Board. These tasks frequently require tools or technologies available within the EOC. Often the need is even more fundamental – space. Space to collaborate with partner agencies and space to review documents and information are requirements that are not always available. As a consequence, adverse results may vary from a minor inconvenience to ineffectual management of pre-incident information.

Alternatives:

No Action: There is no status quo. Administrative and Command staff of the Department of Fire and Rescue will be moving. The Fire-Rescue Training Division will be expanding. Not only does this alternative offer no resolution to the numerous issues outlined in this document, but OEM staff will lose their current office space, effectively displacing a minimum of four (4) personnel.

*Reallocation of
Existing
Facilities:*

Several months ago a concept plan was considered that moved the EOC into two (2) classrooms inside the main building at the Fire-Rescue Training Center. Although this addresses the need to have a more substantial building, it does not resolve the various issues related to shared spaces. Further, this would

***Reallocation of existing
space does not address the
issues related to shared
space.***

basically negate any expansion efforts of the Fire-Rescue Training Division. During times of activation, students will continue to be displaced. There is actually less square footage in these two (2) classrooms than currently used in the modular annex. Additionally, these rooms are physically separated by a set of walls. Removal of these walls would open the area which is necessary during an EOC activation but would impose upon educational activities on daily a basis. This alternative also requires identifying adequate space for OEM staff.

Identify Another

Facility:

Abandoning the current project will result in a return to “square one.” A cursory review of County facilities failed to identify any building, currently available, that would meet the operational, administrative, and logistic requirements necessary to establish a functional EOC. If this alternative is pursued, a more detailed

“Abandoning the current project will result in a return to ‘square one’.”

search of County (and LCPS) buildings will be required with a subsequent needs analysis. It is possible that a privately owned building may meet the needs identified, however that too would require a substantial investment in staff time for inquiry. In this scenario, there is an opportunity that decision makers will be faced with similar reservations as those voiced during discussions related to the Devin Shafron facility.

Recommendations:

Immediate:

Support the initiative presented. Determine the most cost effective method to fund the facility identified. A favorable response to this recommendation will confirm the commitment shared by all emergency management stakeholders to provide a level of excellence in the delivery of this essential service to the citizens of Loudoun County.

Long Term:

Support the development of a permanent solution. Although it is not immediately clear where and under what conditions a permanent EOC might reside, it is important to keep that objective in plain sight. Continued support from County leadership will be instrumental in the realization of this ultimate solution.

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